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ABSTRACT

As part of a larger ethnographic study, this book focuses on Mexican American family life, parental attitudes toward school, and efforts to increase student achievement by changing families. Exploration of the daily life of the 10 immigrant families sheds light on what educators have interpreted as the disinterest of newly arrived immigrants in their children's education. It is argued that Mexican working-class parents bring to the United States goals, life plans, and experiences that do not help them make sense of what the schools expect of their children. Schools expect a "standard" family and show little sensitivity to the immigrants' culture. Examination of the lives and backgrounds of these families shows that parents' expectations of the "good life" are often incongruent with the school's definitions of success. While it was true that the families in this study were not producing successful students, it was not because they were bad parents. There are many reasons to question the efficacy of programs aimed at changing the family, and this is especially true for Mexican American immigrants, for whom efforts to change the family can upset the delicate balance that allows them to survive. Any efforts that target this group must be culturally sensitive and based on appreciation and respect for the family values that these parents have brought with them. (Contains 5 figures and 232 references.) (SLD)

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